

primesautiers qui trouvent infailliblement le juste au premier essai ; même en Amérique ils sont rares. La science fait donc bien de se contenter aussi d'ouvriers modestes qui arrivent au résultat avec plus de peine, en tâtonnant.

BÂLE, SUISSE,
16 Juin, 1905.

DERIVATION OF THE NAME CHAMAECRISTA

BY EDWARD L. GREENE

Called on not long since in private for an explanation of the meaning of the generic name *Chamaecrista*, I think it may be well to offer here in detail the answer which I then gave in brief, and orally to the enquirer; for the name has never been explained in any book, the genus itself dating, practically, from my own defense of its validity made publicly only a few years ago.*

The derivation of *Chamaecrista* is so inseparably connected with the history and nomenclature of an older and nearly related genus that one must go back to the botany of more than two centuries ago for the real origin of the name in question.

One of the most graceful and elegant, if not the most showy, among many ornamental trees and shrubs of the family of the Caesalpiniaceae is that to which Linnaeus gave the name *Poinciana pulcherrima*, a shrub now common in parks and gardens in all tropic and subtropic lands and often to be seen in conservatories far northward. In its large clusters of few and large flowers, the bright red stamens are more conspicuously beautiful than the yellow corollas. There are ten of these to each flower, the greatly elongated glossy filaments each surmounted by its anther, and all standing out away beyond the corolla; and this cluster of stamens evidently suggested to the first botanical observer and investigator of the shrub, that crest of slender graceful round-topped feathers that adorns the head of a peacock; and, as this superbly flowering shrub was then new and in need of a name, the botanist, whom I shall presently mention, called it *Crista Pavonis*.

* Pittonia, 3 : 238.

The author was Jacob Breyne, whose fine folio of descriptions, with excellent copper-plate engravings, of one hundred new or rare exotics, was published at Dantzic, in the year 1678, and now numbers itself among the rich classics of seventeenth-century botany. Up to that time, as well as even somewhat later, botanical nomenclators were indifferent as to whether a generic name were made up of one word or of two, or even three; and Breyne, in the present instance, offered to the public a choice between two names for this new type, each of them a generic name of two terms, each alluding to that semblance of a peacock crown presented by the stamens. It might be denominated "*Frutex Pavoninus, sive Crista Pavonis*"; and contemporary botanists adopted the second of the two; and this latinization of peacock's crest remained the accepted name of this beautiful genus until Tournefort — something of a reformer in nomenclature — renamed it *Poinciana*.

Thus far we seem to have arrived at no more than the origin of the last half of the name *Chamacrista*; but the history of the first half may be told more briefly.

In the selfsame volume in which *Crista Pavonis* was published as a genus, Breyne proposes a second new genus belonging to this same family; the type of this a low herb, yet in some of its aspects so much like *Crista Pavonis* that he names this one *Chamacrista Pavonis*, the low, or dwarf peacock's crest. This plant so named by Breyne is the historic type of the modern genus *Chamacrista*. Linnaeus, in 1753, decided that it might be viewed as a species of the genus *Cassia*, and, dropping the second term, *Pavonis*, of Breyne's double-worded generic name, the great reformer assigned the plant the binary name *Cassia Chamacrista*.

In restoring to its well-merited rank this genus originally proposed by Breyne, it was fitting that it should bear the name *Chamacrista* rather than Breyne's original and too sesquipedalian *Chamacristapavonis*. We realize our general indebtedness to the Swedish reformer of nomenclature, who knew so well how to abbreviate names that seemed too long; and we seem likely to need him again, or some other in his place, by and by; for

Chamaecristapavonis, long as it looks, is but by one syllable longer than a somewhat recent generic name *Pseudocymopterus*, and is of just the same length as *Neowashingtonia*, still more recently proposed.

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TWO MISINTERPRETED SPECIES OF XYRIS

BY ROLAND M. HARPER

The name *Xyris flexuosa* Muhl. has been almost always applied to a certain widely distributed species which is about the only representative of its genus over most of the glaciated region of the northeastern United States.* This name is usually considered as dating from the first edition of Muhlenberg's Catalogue, published in 1813, but in that work there is nothing by which the species can be definitely identified, and indeed no specific descriptions were attempted in the whole catalogue. (The words in the fourth column, on which so much stress was laid by Mr. Bicknell and Dr. Robinson in discussing the identity of certain species of *Agrimonia* a few years ago, are expressly stated by Muhlenberg in his preface to be merely the English names of the species, and they cannot therefore be regarded as descriptions.) For the original description of *Xyris flexuosa* we must turn to the first part of the first volume of Elliott's Botany of South Carolina and Georgia, published in 1816, in which four species of *Xyris* were recognized. Two of these were new, based on the collections of Dr. Baldwin in Georgia, and another was identified by Elliott with *X. brevipolia* Mx., but was later found by Dr. Chapman to be quite different, and named by him *Xyris Elliottii*. The remaining one is *X. flexuosa* Muhl., and the description, habitat, and time of flowering assigned to it point clearly enough to a plant with corkscrew-like stem and twisted leaves which we now know to range from New Jersey to Florida and Texas, mostly in the pine-barrens, and which was known to nearly all 19th century authors as *X. torta*. Elliott gives as a synonym *X. caroliniana* Walt., but this species can hardly be identified, since it was the

* See *Rhodora* 7: 73. 1905.